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Detachment 88, Indonesia's counter-terrorism unit, inspects a stall after arresting individuals for allegedly planning a terrorist attack with support from Syria.

AL-SHABAAB ATTACK ON PEACEKEEPERS CANNOT HIDE GROUPS' DISARRAY

James Brandon

The Somali Islamist militant organization al-Shabaab carried out one of its most lethal attacks in years on September 1, when it bombed a Ugandan military base in the Janale district of the lower Shabele region, southwest of the capital Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab claimed that the attack killed around 50 Ugandan soldiers, who are in the country as part of an African Union (AU) peacekeeping mission, although official AU statements have not announced the casualty toll (AU, September 1). The attack began when a suicide bomber drove an explosive-packed car into the base's entrance, after which a large number of other militants stormed the facility (Horseed Media, September 1). A statement issued by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) said that the Ugandan troops "undertook a tactical withdrawal" and later regained control over the base (AMISOM, September 1). Following the attack, AMISON troops, backed by helicopters, undertook searches in the region to locate both missing troops and any of the al-Shabaab attackers (Horseed Media, September 2). Following the attack, security was strengthened in the capital, particularly at the presidential palace (Horseed Media, September 2).

The attack underlines that al-Shabaab remains capable of conducting occasional devastating attacks in Somalia, as well as in neighboring countries like Kenya. However, there is also a risk of reading too much into the heavy casualties apparently inflicted by the latest attack, which seems more likely to indicate that while the group remains capable of mounting deadly attacks when circumstances permit, it is not necessarily making a longer-term comeback. In addition, such high-profile attacks are now relatively rare, and the group's attacks are more commonly conducted against soft targets as shown, for instance, by the group's killing of an off-duty female government official on the evening of August 29, near her home in Mogadishu (Horseed Media, August 30).

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The attack also does not materially alter the fact al-Shabaab currently controls only limited amounts of Somalia, having been driven out of all its major urban centers in the country during the last several years. Moreover, AMISON and its Somali and international partners continue to undertake projects intended to build up the capacity of the Somali security services, which should in time reduce al-Shabaab's operational freedom further. For instance, on August 22, AMISOM announced the training of 200 additional Somali police who will be deployed to towns in the country's southwest, which largely lacks any formal law enforcement presence (AMISOM, August 22). In other regions, AMISOM has launched community policing initiatives, although these are likely to take time to bear fruit (AMISOM, August, 30).

At the same time, however, abuses committed by AU troops in Somalia continue to stir popular resentment of foreign forces and to potentially create new support for al-Shabaab. For instance, on August 21, AMISOM publicly acknowledged that its forces had killed seven civilians in an incident in the port town of Marka on July 21 (Horseed Media, August 21). In the incident, AMISOM troops had stormed a wedding party, separated the men from the women and then shot dead the men. AMISOM originally denied that the incident had occurred, but was later forced to back down amid growing evidence of its troops' actions. Separately, Somali elders in El-Qooxoole, in Galgaduud region in central Somalia, recently accused Ethiopian troops of killing four local teachers and 11 tribal elders, although the Ethiopian government has not yet acknowledged this accusation (Dalsan Radio [Mogadishu], September 1). Such abuses threaten to undermine the gains made against al-Shabaab, which, in Somalia at least, increasingly resembles a degraded insurgent group kept continuously on the back foot, rather than the formidable political and military machine that it was in former years.

FRENCH TRAIN ATTACK ILLUSTRATES THREAT AND LIMITATIONS OF 'LONE WOLF' OPERATIONS

James Brandon

The latest "lone wolf" to strike in Western Europe launched his attack on August 21, on a high-speed train travelling from Amsterdam in the Netherlands to Paris, the French capital. The perpetrator, Ayoub el-Khazzani, a 25-year-old Moroccan national who had previously lived in Spain, was armed with a AK-47 assault rifle (with 270 rounds of ammunition), a pistol and a box-cutter knife (France24, August 21; France24, August 25). Prior to launching the attack, El-Khazzani hid in a train toilet where he watched some jihadist videos on his phone for last-minute inspiration and prepared his weapons. Exiting the cubicle and entering a passenger carriage, he fired several shots with his assault rifle, injuring a number of passengers. However, El-Khazzani's gun rapidly jammed and two off-duty U.S. servicemen and their friend rushed down the carriage, tackling him before he could un-jam it. Within seconds, he had been beaten unconscious by the three men and then further restrained with a tie provided by a nearby 62-year-old British IT consultant (France24, August 22). For El-Khazzani, the jihad was over.

The brief and unsuccessful operation, the latest in a series of attacks by so-called "lone wolves" in Western Europe and North America, highlights a number of factors. Firstly, the attack underlines that the "lone wolf" threat, hyped by jihadist groups, various governments and some independent researchers, while real, often fails to live up to its dramatic billing. In particular, "lone wolves" clearly face a number of operational challenges that repeatedly hinder their attacks. In the case of the Paris attack, the gunman's lack of familiarity with his weapon, combined with the fact that he lacked any form of support or back-up, meant that as soon as he encountered any problem, unarmed individuals were able to swiftly engage and neutralize him. Indeed, even larger self-radicalized teams, so-called "lone-wolf packs" who have attempted to train themselves, usually via online sources, sometimes have little more success. For instance, in May, two radicalized gunmen attempted to attack a Muhammad cartoon competition in Garland, Texas; exiting their vehicle they began firing wildly, and were immediately shot dead by police guarding the event, having succeeded only in injuring one security guard in the ankle (CNN, May 4). Similarly, the October 2014 attack on the Canadian parliament by a lone radicalized Muslim convert killed only one person, despite the gun-wielding attacker getting into the heart of the facility (CBC, October 22, 2014). Such cases underline that while online training and recruitment videos produced by jihadists

may be able to inspire attackers, their virtual training has clear limitations in the real world.

A second issue is that even if such attacks are successful they generally do nothing to advance the attackers' political cause. For instance, the 011 gun and bomb attack in Norway by Anders Breivik, a far-right activist who is arguably the most successful "lone wolf"—his attack killed 77—actively set back and discredited the country's so-called "counter-jihad" movement, which Breivik had hoped would be strengthened and galvanized by his attacks. Similarly, the fatal "lone wolf pack" on the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine in Paris in January, while it succeeded in killing the targeted cartoonists, also triggered a four-million strong solidarity protest, the largest such gathering in post-World War II France, in support of the freedom of speech that the gunmen had sought to suppress (France24, January 11). The attack also triggered a wide range of French policy initiatives that are designed to reduce the threat of radicalization in the long-term. Likewise, the latest train attack has already triggered increased security across Europe, including armed patrols and more spot-checks, that aim to thwart future attacks (BBC, August 29). In addition, as the French train attack dramatically showed, another outcome of such repeated attacks is that societal preparedness—and the willingness of civilians to engage suspected armed jihadists—increases with such attack; each attack therefore reduces the potential for successive attacks to succeed.

On the other hand, however, jihadist groups are able to inspire such "lone wolf" attacks at minimal financial cost, or direct risk, to themselves, or without depleting their own active pools of trained fighters. Such attacks also allow groups that are largely contained in battlefields such as Syria and Yemen to overcome borders and physical checks on their movements. For this reason, jihadist organizations are likely to attempt to continue to seek to encourage such attacks for the foreseeable future, even if such attacks routinely fail to achieve their objectives. Moreover, the French train attack also arguably showed jihadists learning from previous lone wolf attacks; one striking element of the attack was that the gunman chose a venue—a high-speed moving train—where a rapid intervention by the security forces would be extremely difficult. As a result of this, the "lone wolf" threat, while often overstated by a range of actors, is nonetheless liable to continue to pose a challenge to law enforcement for the foreseeable future.

The Finnish Foreign Fighter Contingent in Syria and Iraq

Juha Saarinen

By August 2015, at least 70 individuals from Finland had travelled to Syria and Iraq (*Suomen Uutiset*, July 30). [1] According to an Interior Ministry report from August 2014, the vast majority intended to join "radical opposition groups" operating in the conflict zone. [2] The latest figures underline the continuing flow of fighters from Finland to Syria, and to a lesser extent, Iraq, to join jihadist groups operating in the conflict zone, particularly the Islamic State organization (*Verkkouutiset*, November 29, 2014).

For Finnish policymakers and security officials, the mobilization of jihadist foreign fighters has been as alarming as it has been unprecedented. Historically, cases of Finnish Muslims travelling abroad to join the caravan of global jihad have been few and far between. In the case of Syria's protracted and brutal civil war, however, Finland has been one of the most significant Western contributors of war volunteers (and likely jihadist foreign fighters) relative to the size of its small Muslim population of approximately 60,000-65,000 (CNN, September 1, 2014). [3]

Mobilization

The flow of Finnish fighters to the Syria and Iraq region came to widespread public attention when Sayid Hussein Feisal Ali (a.k.a. "Abu Shuayb al-Somali")—a Finnish jihadist of Somali descent—appeared in an Islamic State propaganda video in August 2014 (*Helsinki Times*, August 17, 2014). However, mobilization had in fact begun at least two years earlier. In August 2012, for instance, radical Finnish converts had reportedly travelled to Syria, and joined opposition groups operating in the north of the country (*Turun Sanomat*, August 30, 2012). Initially, the contingent included a range of individuals with various motivations. In addition to jihadist foreign fighters, who joined groups like Kataib al-Muhajireen (later known as Jaysh al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar), Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State, humanitarians, mercenaries and non-jihadist foreign fighters also travelled to the war-torn country (MTV Uutiset, March 5, 2014). As a result, by March 2014, over 30 individuals from Finland had found their way into Syria, although only around half could be described as foreign fighters, in the sense of individuals committed to Islamist ideologies (CTC Sentinel, March 26, 2014).

The dynamics of this mobilization, however, had begun to change by summer 2013, with the vast majority of individuals arriving in the region now seeking to join jihadist groups, particularly Islamic State (*Verkkouutiset*, November 29, 2014). During the last 12 months in particular, Syria and Iraq seem to have attracted nearly exclusively jihadist foreign fighters. [4] Indeed, since the Islamist State entered the Syrian civil war in force, most individuals traveling to the conflict zone from Finland have sought to join the group, going on to fight in its ranks on both sides of the Iraqi-Syrian border.

Despite the conflict appealing to an increasingly narrow group of individuals, i.e. young radicalized Sunni Muslims, the flow of volunteers from Finland has continued unabated, highlighting the monumental impact that the conflict in Syria, and the rise of the Islamic State, has had on the militant Islamist landscape in Finland. [5] Demonstrating this, between September 2014 and July 2015 alone, the number of known Finland-originated individuals in Syria (and to a lesser extent, Iraq) grew from at least 44 to at least 70 (Ministry of Interior, September 10, 2014; *Suomen Uutiset*, July 30). [6]

The Contingent

Among the Finnish contingent fighting in Syria and Iraq, at least 19 different ethnic backgrounds are represented (*Suomen Kuvalehti*, August 7). This includes Somalis and Finnish converts (both groups are strongly represented among the contingents' jihadist foreign fighters), few individuals of Arab descent, a Turk, a Pakistani, a Bangladeshi, a Finnish-Namibian and a Finnish-American. These demographics reflect the diverse ethnic character of Finland's Muslim population and also highlight the extraordinary resonance of the conflict among Sunni Muslim communities across the globe. Despite their ethnic diversity, the majority of individuals identified by government authorities are "homegrown," and they were either born in Finland or lived there since childhood. Subsequently, most of them are Finnish citizens (*Suomen Kuvalehti*, August 7).

The age range of the departed varies from 18 to 50 (Ministry of Interior, September 10, 2014). However, there have also been reports of several under-aged children in the conflict zone, who have either travelled to the region with their parents or have been born there (*Iltasanomat*, January 10). Unsurprisingly, however, the majority of the individuals are young men in their late teens and mid-twenties. Around one-fifth of the contingent, however, are women. At least 13 women have travelled from Finland to Syria or Iraq, some with their partners and some alone (*Iltalehti*, July 22; *Iltasanomat*, December 20, 2014). The majority of the

women are either Somalis or Finnish converts, who support the Islamic State.

Geographically, there have been departures from across Finland. However, most foreign fighters originate from larger cities and suburban areas in southern and western Finland (Ministry of Interior, September 10, 2014), mainly the Helsinki metropolitan region and Turku.

Current State of the Contingent

It is not entirely clear how many Finland-originated individuals are currently active in Syria and Iraq. From the approximately 70 confirmed cases that have travelled to the conflict zone, at least 8-11 are believed to have died (Kouvola Sanomat, April 6). [7] In addition, around 20 individuals have been confirmed to have returned from the conflict zone. (Helsingin Sanomat, June 2). This last estimate, however, has remained the same since late 2014, although there is some evidence that suggests there have been new returnees since (YLE, October 13). A minimum estimate would therefore be that around half of the 70 or so Finland-originated individuals are still in the conflict zone, mostly if not nearly exclusively in areas controlled by the Islamic State. While it is exceedingly difficult to confirm the role and activity of these individuals, the vast majority of the men likely are, or seek to become, jihadist foreign fighters while several women seem to have adopted propaganda and recruitment roles to support the group's social media activities. [8]

Will the Mobilization Continue?

The flow of individuals from Finland to Syria, and to a lesser extent Iraq, will likely continue as long as both the conflict in Syria and the Islamic State group attract foreign fighters. There are also two domestic issues that increase the likelihood of further Finnish jihadists travelling to the conflict zone.

First, the domestic militant Islamist landscape in Finland has grown significantly and become more organized during the last two years in particular, increasing the likelihood of radicalized individuals either travelling abroad for foreign fighting or encouraging others to do so (*Verkkouutiset*, November 29, 2014). According to the officials, there have been signs of emerging multi-ethnic radical social networks in Finland (MTV Uutiset, March 5, 2014). Likewise, online social networks seem to have played a significant role in the mobilization to Syria and Iraq, although more research on social networks is required (The Ulkopolitist, March 10).

Secondly, the Finnish authorities have only limited means to effectively prevent or discourage individuals from traveling to the conflict zone, as neither foreign fighting nor joining jihadist groups classified as terrorist organizations have been criminalized. Although the Finnish Security Intelligence Service (FSIS) have actively sought to discourage people from leaving for the conflict zone by talking with those individuals suspected of planning to leave, there have only been a few cases where such efforts were successful. One such case occurred in 2013, when the FSIS was able to discourage “Abdullah”—a former Islamic State online cheerleader better known through his former twitter account @Mujahid4Life—from travelling to Syria to join Jabhat al-Nusra (*Newsweek*, June 5). However, with only limited means to tackle emerging mobilization, cases like that of “Abdullah” will likely be few and far between, while the contingent of domestic radicals and of fighters in Iraq and Syria continues to grow.

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Notes

1. The actual number of individuals who have travelled from Finland to Syria or Iraq is likely higher as not everyone who travels to the conflict zone is known to the authorities. There have been speculations that over 100 individuals from Finland have left for the conflict zone (YLE, March 20).
2. “Violent extremism in Finland – situation overview 2/2014,” (Helsinki: Interior Ministry, Internal Security Programme, September 10, 2014).
3. It should be mentioned that CNN relied on inaccurate data. First, while there are no official statistics available, Finland’s Muslim population is estimated to be around 60,000-65,000, not 42,000. Second, at the time, over 40 individuals had gone from Finland to the conflict zone, although not all who had travelled to Syria could be considered jihadists (*Iltasanomat*, March 5, 2014; CTC Sentinel, March 26, 2014). However, considering the estimated size of Finland’s current Muslim population and the approximate number of Finland-originated jihadist foreign fighters, their overall assertion is accurate.
4. In addition, an unknown number of individuals from Finland who have travelled to the conflict zone to fight *against* the Islamic State (Talouselämä, August 26).
5. While there are no official, openly available reports on the size and structure of militant Islamist scene in Finland, the number of radicalised individuals with connections to known radicalised individuals, terrorist networks, or groups

operating abroad, and who are actively under surveillance by the Finnish Security Intelligence Service (FSIS), has grown from a mere handful in late 2010 to approximately 300 in early 2015, the majority of whom are radicalized Sunni Muslims (YLE, December 12, 2010, Savon Sanomat, February 20).

6. However, it is not clear whether the latter estimation includes individuals who had travelled to the region earlier, but who were only identified after September 2014.
7. Only three casualties have been reported in Finnish media, Abu Salamah al-Finlandi in June 2013, Abu Anas al-Finlandi in February 2014 and Abu Mansour al-Somali in June 2014 (YLE, August 1, 2013; Helsingin Sanomat, February 22, 2014; Helsingin Sanomat, June 9, 2014).
8. Research by this author suggests that at least six of the thirteen women who have travelled in the conflict zone have either openly identified as the Islamic State supporters online, or have shared the group’s message in social media or discussion forums.

Islamic State in Afghanistan Ready to Capitalize on Mullah Omar's Death

Farhan Zahid

Afghanistan's Taliban, in July 2015, confirmed the death of their leader, the amir al-mumineen (Commander of the Faithful), Mullah Muhammad Omar. Refuting allegations that Mullah Omar had lived in Pakistan, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said that Omar "did not leave Afghanistan since the U.S.-backed forces overthrew the group in 2001, despite the Afghan assertion he died in a hospital in Pakistan" (VOA, July 30). Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security (NDS) had earlier claimed that Mullah Omar expired in a Karachi hospital in 2013. In a late August statement, however, the Taliban admitted that Omar had indeed died in April 2013 (al-Arabiya, August 31).

One important effect of the Taliban's confirmation of Mullah Omar's death is that it may allow the Islamic State militant group to expand in Afghanistan, an area which the latter organization refers to as part of Wilayat Khurasan, which covers Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asian republics. This expansion is in line with the group's strategic vision of global expansion. For instance, after strengthening its control over territories in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State's global leader and self-declared caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi said:

Glad tidings, O Muslims, for we give you good news by announcing the expansion of the Islamic State to new lands, to the lands of Saudi Arabia and Yemen, to Egypt, Libya and Algeria. We announce the acceptance of *bayah* (allegiance) of those who gave us *bayah* in those lands, the nullification of the groups therein, the announcement of new *wilayat* (province) for the Islamic State and the appointment of leaders for them. [1]

There are already visible Islamic State footprints in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the group has already penetrated into the jihadist circles there. The group, in November, also announced Abdul Rahim Muslim Dost as its interim amir for the Khurasan region (*Dawn*, November 14, 2014). Dost, an Afghan national, was a former detainee at the U.S. Guantanamo Bay detention facility (*Xinhua*, September 30, 2006). Following his release, he rejoined the Afghan Taliban, but later pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi after the Islamic State became prominent in Iraq in 2014. Despite this promising jihadist CV, in an unusual step, the Islamic State's high command soon replaced Dost with Hafiz

Saeed Khan, a Pakistani commander of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan-Fazlullah (TTP-F) jihadist group who had defected to the Islamic State in September 2014 (*Economic Times*, January 28). Saeed Khan had previously commanded TTP-F's Orakzai chapter in Pakistan, where he hailed. He was soon however killed in a U.S. drone strike in Afghanistan in mid-2015, disrupting the Islamic State's plans for him (*Dawn*, July 12).

The advent of the Islamic State in Afghanistan is also likely to affect al-Qaeda's operations in the region. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri disowned the other organization in 2013, a decision that effectively split the global jihadist movement. The two groups are now locked in a battle for supremacy and are competing to win the loyalties of jihadists worldwide. Since the Islamic State's capture of Mosul from the Iraqi state in 2014 and its subsequent proclamation of the creation of an Islamic State in the group's territories in Syria and Iraq, a plethora of former al-Qaeda affiliates have pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi. This has also happened in Afghanistan, where some former al-Qaeda-linked jihadist groups have also pledged allegiance to Baghdadi, including Tehrik-e-Khilafat Pakistan, the Shahidullah Shahid Group of TTP and Jundullah (*The News*, October 6, 2014).

In Afghanistan, a small group of al-Qaeda militants who had pledged allegiance to veteran Afghan mujahideen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, of the Hizb-e-Islami militant group, also joined hands with the Islamic State in Afghanistan. Hizb-e-Islami, however, denied claims that Hekmatyar himself had joined the Islamic State in Afghanistan (*Express Tribune*, July 13).

Another reason why the Taliban's announcement of the death of Mullah Omar may also accelerate the expansion of the Islamic State among the region's jihadist groups is that Omar was the only jihadist amir who could challenge al-Baghdadi's credentials as "caliph" of the "Islamic State," given that Omar had already made himself amir al-mumineen of the "Islamic Emirate" of Afghanistan. By contrast, al-Zawahiri had never claimed such titles for himself, and he had also renewed his pledge of allegiance to Mullah Omar after the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011 (Bin Laden had himself pledged allegiance to Mullah Omar in 1999). The pledging of al-Qaeda's present and former amirs technically made al-Qaeda subsidiaries of the Afghan Taliban movement (the *bayah* is technically from leader to leader, not from organization to organization). [2] In response, al-Qaeda is trying hard to protect its leaders and affiliates from defecting to the Islamic State. An additional recent al-Qaeda move to reinvigorate its jihadist activities and to try to regain the initiative from the Islamic State was its announcement of the creation of al-Qaeda in the Indian

Subcontinent (AQIS) in September 2014.

In addition, the Afghan Taliban movement appears likely to lose followers to the Islamic State after the death of Mullah Omar, who enjoyed a demigod-like status among his followers. The Islamic State, for its part, would certainly like to intrude into the areas traditionally known to have a strong Taliban following in Afghanistan, and particularly to take advantage of Mullah Omar's death. Underlining this determination, in August, the Islamic State's media wing released a video showing 10 Taliban fighters captured by the group being forced to kneel on landmines, which then blew them to pieces (al-Arabiya, August 12). This graphically demonstrated that the Islamic State is fully ready to openly take on the Afghan Taliban and is in no mood to compromise. Similarly, in June 2015, fierce clashes between Taliban and Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province resulted in deaths of 80 fighters from both sides. In response, the Taliban warned the Islamic State to stay out of Afghanistan (*Express Tribune*, June 20).

The Islamic State's announcement of the creation of an Islamic state and its appointment of al-Baghdadi as caliph, which effectively demands the obedience of all other jihadist groups, showcases the group's unaccommodating attitudes towards all other jihadist organizations, including in Afghanistan. A major issue is competition for religious-political leadership. The Islamic State appears to view the Afghan Taliban as a rival to their "Islamic state," and the Taliban's claims to the title of amir al-mumineen is clearly a challenge to their caliph. In this context, al-Qaeda leaders' repeated pledging to the Afghan Taliban has potentially aggravated the Islamic State's leadership further, especially given the long-standing rivalry between the two groups. The Islamic State's recent killings of Afghan Taliban also show that the group now appears willing to take on the group in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, al-Qaeda pledges to the Afghan Taliban also show that while both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State adhere to Salafist-Jihadist ideology, al-Qaeda is more willing to compromise with its jihadist opponents. For example, despite its ideological and theological differences with Taliban's Deobandi school of thought, al-Qaeda has always been willing to overlook these in order to focus on common political objectives and advance the overall jihadist cause. The Islamic State, on the other hand, is not ready to make any concessions to other jihadist groups either in political matters or on religious differences.

The killing of the Islamic State's newly appointed regional amir, Hafiz Saeed Khan, is a big setback to the group's nascent

structure in Afghanistan, and this may slow down the pace of the group's operations and expansion (*Express Tribune*, July 11). In particular, after these losses, The Islamic State may take some time to reinvigorate its network and appoint new leaders. On the other hand, despite these setbacks, the Islamic State apparently remains set to capitalize on the very large pool of radicalized Islamist Afghans and Pakistani potential jihadists whose loyalty to the Afghan Taliban is now waning after the death of Mullah Omar.

Farhan Zahid writes on counter-terrorism, al-Qaeda, Pakistani al-Qaeda-linked groups, Islamist violent non-state actors in Pakistan, militant landscapes in Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban.

Notes

1. Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, (London: William Collins, 2015), p. 184.
2. *Ibid.* p. 190.

Indonesia's New Counter-Terrorism Challenges

Andrew Zammit and Muhammad Iqbal

Following the 2002 Bali bombings, Indonesia confronted a seemingly unmanageable terrorist problem. Over the next decade, however, the country became widely viewed as a counter-terrorism success story as the threat from al-Qaeda-linked or -inspired jihadist groups declined dramatically. Unfortunately, the transnational pull of the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and the emergence of the Islamic State, risk undermining Indonesia's counter-terrorism successes.

Background

In the early 2000s, a range of jihadist groups operated across the Indonesian archipelago. These were not initially considered a major security concern by the government, as Indonesia prioritized rebuilding its economy after the Asian Financial Crisis and consolidating its democracy after overcoming a 32-year-long dictatorship. Additionally, most of these groups confined their violence to the islands of Maluku and Sulawesi, where communal conflicts had broken out between Muslims and Christians.

One such group, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), had a close relationship with al-Qaeda, dating back to the 1980s foreign fighter mobilization against the Soviets in Afghanistan. JI's co-founders Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Bashir were hesitant to follow Osama bin Laden's 1998 call for attacks on Western military and civilian targets, but one faction of JI chose to join al-Qaeda's global war. This faction was led by Riduan Isamuddin, a.k.a. Hambali, who had a close operational relationship with 9/11 architect Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. Hambali's JI faction bombed churches across Indonesia, unsuccessfully attempted to attack the U.S. Embassy in Singapore and in October 2002, bombed tourist venues in Bali, killing 202 people. [1]

In response, Indonesia launched a police-led counter-terrorism campaign, assisted by Australia, the United States and other countries, arresting hundreds of suspected militants. Hambali himself was arrested in Thailand, suspected of planning an attack against the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Bangkok (*The Age*, August 15, 2003). One of the Bali bombers, Noordin Mohammad Top, stepped in to Hambali's role and continued attacking Western-associated targets in Indonesia. His faction bombed the Jakarta Marriot Hotel in September 2003, the Australian Embassy in September 2004 and Bali

tourist venues again in October 2005 (*Kompas*, August 9, 2003).

Each bombing led to further arrests by Detachment 88, a new counter-terrorism unit within the Indonesian National Police. In response to the crackdown, JI's leadership distanced itself from Noordin's breakaway faction and eschewed mass-casualty attacks on foreign targets. Instead, they sought a secure base in Poso, a Sulawesi town recovering from recent communal conflict. JI's Poso network focused on killing Christians and government officials, and in 2005, shocked the nation by beheading three Christian schoolgirls (*Jakarta Post*, April 26, 2013). In 2007, Detachment 88 killed and arrested many members of the network, prompting JI to cease violence and focus on gradually rebuilding itself.

JI was further weakened in 2008, when their former leader Abu Bakar Bashir created a new organization, Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), taking many JI members with him. [2] Noordin's network, also weakened by counter-terrorism efforts, failed to launch another major attack until July 2009, when it bombed Jakarta's Marriot and Ritz-Carlton hotels. Detachment 88 killed Noordin in raids after the attack, and his network did not recover (*Jakarta Post*, August 8, 2009).

Following these setbacks, Indonesian jihadism took a different direction. Leading figures, including clerics and fighters, rejected both the Noordin network's strategy of prioritizing foreign targets and JI's approach of favoring outreach over action. Instead they established a training camp in Aceh province, which had experienced decades of separatist conflict. The camp involved every major Indonesian jihadist group except for JI, and received funding from Abu Bakar Bashir's JAT. Their plan was to hold territory and gradually build up an insurgency, which they saw as the approach taken in the southern Philippines, southern Thailand and Chechnya. [3]

They miscalculated. The aspiring insurgents lacked popular support, and locals soon tipped off the police. In early 2010, Detachment 88 launched raids, killing eight of the militants and arresting 48 others in the following months. [4] Aman Abdurrahman, the camp's leading spiritual authority, was jailed. Bashir was later jailed for providing funding (*Kompas*, June 19, 2011).

Indonesian jihadism, thereafter, only continued at a low level. Fragmented networks of jihadists turned to small-scale attacks, robbing stores and killing police officers. Attempted attacks on foreign targets became rare, except for a possible plot against tourists in Bali in 2012 and a failed attempt to bomb the Myanmar Embassy in 2013 (*Jakarta Globe*, March

22, 2012; *Jakarta Post*, January 22, 2014). Counter-terrorism efforts had suppressed the most violent networks, but pools of supporters remained and waited for opportunities, which were soon provided by the conflict in Syria.

Indonesian Jihadists in Syria and Iraq

From 2012, Indonesia's radical Islamist organizations watched the Syrian war closely. Abu Bakar Bashir described the conflict as a "university for jihad education," and Indonesians joined a range of groups, including the Islamic State (then the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria—ISIS) and al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. [5] Their first "martyr" was announced in November 2013, by a Syrian Islamist militia, the Suqour al-Izz Brigade. They claimed Riza Fardi, an Indonesian who had been studying in Yemen and then joined the Syrian uprising, had died fighting in eastern Ghouta (Inside Indonesia, August 3).

By 2014, the Islamic State had become the most popular group for Indonesian jihadists, who began to appear in its propaganda (*Tempo*, January 5). The al-Hayat Center, an Islamic State media outlet, released an eight-minute Bahasa Indonesian-language video on July 23, 2014, called "Join the Ranks" (*Tempo*, January 4). The video featured a man later identified as Bahrum Syah, who was a follower of Amman Abdurrahman and left Indonesia in March 2014, at the age of 29 (*Kompas*, August 6, 2014; *Kompas*, August 8, 2014). Bahrum Syah called upon "the brothers in Indonesia, [to] have patience, be upright upon *tauhid* (monotheism) and put all your effort into using your physical and financial strength to emigrate to the Islamic State, for *hijrah* (migration) today is obligatory. It is an obligation decreed by Allah the Exalted." [6]

In September 2014, Indonesian and Malaysian Islamic State fighters announced the existence of a Bahasa-speaking unit called "Katibah Nusantara Lid Daulah Islamiyah," meaning the Malay Archipelago unit of the Islamic State. [7] The unit has at least 22 members with combat experience, reportedly brought together because their lack of English and Arabic proficiency created a need for their own unit (*Kompas*, May 26, 2014).

There are competing estimates of how many Indonesians are involved with jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq. One of the most widely-used estimates is that up to 500 have joined the conflict, including fighters, but also their wives and families (*The Strategist*, July 17). Around 40 have reportedly been killed (*The Australian*, July 1). Given Indonesia's Muslim population is an estimated 209 million, 500 people does not represent a dramatically large level of involvement

in Syria and Iraq. [8] Despite this, the conflict's potential to reinvigorate Indonesian jihadism has led to a proactive response by the government.

Developments at Home

Indonesian authorities are greatly concerned about the foreign fighter mobilization and have arrested several suspects. One suspect was Afif Abdul Majid, who had been the head of JAT's Central Java branch, had helped fund the failed Aceh camp and was placed on the U.S. Treasury Department's sanctions list for his terrorist involvement (U.S. Department of Treasury, September 18, 2013). He was arrested in August 2014, after returning from Syria. In December 2014, police arrested a group of six people suspected of planning to join the Islamic State, and then arrested a seventh person, thought to have facilitated their attempted travel (*Kompas*, December 27, 2014). In March 2015, three suspected Syria returnees were arrested (*Jakarta Post*, March 27). That same month, Turkish police arrested 16 Indonesians suspected of trying to join the Islamic State (*Kompas*, March 19). Indonesian police then arrested four men for allegedly arranging travel documents (for these 16 suspected Islamic State supporters and 21 others) (*Malay Mail*, March 23). 12 of the suspects deported from Turkey were subsequently entered into a de-radicalization program (*Kompas*, March 26).

However, securing convictions has been difficult. Prosecutors could not convict Afif Abdul Majid for his activities in Syria, even though he admitted training with the Islamic State and pledging allegiance to them (*Jakarta Post*, July 10). The government banned the militant organization in August 2014, but it is not currently clear what the ban means in practice (*Tempo*, January 5).

Indonesia's jihadist groups have increasingly taken inspiration from the Islamic State. Aman Abdurrahman, currently imprisoned for his role in the Aceh camp, pledged allegiance in an online oath to Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (*Jakarta Post*, June 14, 2014). However, support to the Islamic State has not been uncontested. Abu Bakar Bashir pledged allegiance to the organization from prison, but the decision split JAT (*Kompas*, July 14, 2014). Bashir's own sons and top aides refused to support the Islamic State and were expelled, going on to form a new group, Jemaah Ansharusy Syariah (JAS – Group of Supporters of Shari'a). Meanwhile JI, which has been quietly redeveloping its military capacity, has sided with Jabhat al-Nusra against the Islamic State (*Tempo*, January 5).

The Islamic State has also gained support from Santoso, the most infamous Indonesian terrorist currently at large.

Santoso is a former JI member who became head of JAT's Central Sulawesi affiliate in 2010 (IPAC [Jakarta], April 15). By late 2012, he formed a coalition of local jihadist groups in Poso, called Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), that repeatedly ambushed and killed police officers. His network maintains ties to jihadists elsewhere in Indonesia, as well as in Malaysia and the Philippines (Janes Terrorism & Insurgency Centre (JITC), February 7, 2013). Escaping multiple raids and manhunts, Santoso has since become Indonesia's most wanted jihadist.

Santoso has released videos taunting police, described himself as "the Abu Musab al-Zarqawi of Indonesia," and was one of the first Indonesian jihadists to pledge allegiance to IS (IPAC [Jakarta], April 15). His group has not been officially recognized by the Islamic State, but it has received support from jihadists abroad. For instance, on September 2014, police arrested four Uyghurs who had entered Indonesia with fake passports and tried to join Santoso's militia (*Jakarta Post*, July 13). They were suspected of having been part of a group that attacked a train station in Kunming in southwestern China (*Jakarta Post*, February 10).

Another concern has been of Islamic State-connected or -inspired bombings within Indonesia. On February 23, 2015, a small chlorine bomb exploded in a mall on the outskirts of Jakarta, but no one was harmed (*Kompas*, February 26). Police blamed the attack on Syria returnees, although no suspects have been named (*Jakarta Globe*, July 11). In July, another mall bombing occurred, which the police linked to the Islamic State's call for attacks during Ramadan (*Kompas*, July 11). On August 12, 2015, Indonesian police arrested three men who were allegedly planning an attack to coincide with Independence Day celebrations (*Kompas*, August 14). The planned attack apparently intended to target police as well as several places of worship in Central Java (*Kompas*, August 14). Police confiscated 21 improvised explosives and Islamic State-related items from the suspects' homes (*Kompas*, August 13). The three men reportedly received funding from an Indonesian currently in Syria (*Kompas*, August 14). As most jihadist attacks in Indonesia since 2010 had been small-scale shootings, these recent plots suggest a potential return to mass-casualty bombings.

Future Prospects

The outlook for Indonesian counter-terrorism is not bleak. The estimated numbers involved in the Syria-Iraq mobilization are relatively small, and many Middle Eastern, North African and Western countries have produced more foreign fighters, both in absolute terms and relative to the size of their Muslim populations. The communal conflicts

in Maluku and Sulawesi, in which jihadist groups thrived, ended over a decade ago and show no signs of restarting. Moreover, Indonesia has developed formidable counter-terrorist capabilities over the past decade.

However, while Indonesia's jihadist networks are not large or widespread, they have proven persistent. Detachment 88 and other counter-terrorism bodies have had tactical successes, but the government has been less successful in its non-coercive effort to undermine support for jihadism. At first, Indonesia's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) approach involved ad-hoc initiatives by police, prison authorities and NGOs. However, in 2010, the military was put in charge of CVE, but has so far not proven adept at it (IPAC [Jakarta], June 30, 2014).

Detachment 88's often-questionable shootings of suspects have also created new grievances for jihadists to use as a rallying cry, potentially undermining CVE attempts (ABC, February 8, 2013). A further issue is increased competition between the military and police. The military plays little substantial role in counter-terrorism, but has recently used the police's failure to catch Santoso to push for greater involvement; the military also has a receptive ear in the new government of President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) (IPAC [Jakarta], May 25). These factors complicate Indonesia's counter-terrorism efforts.

The resilience of Indonesia's jihadist networks meanwhile provides opportunities for the Islamic State. The threat Indonesia faced in the early 2000s resulted in part from local extremist groups becoming involved in the 1980s foreign fighter mobilization to Afghanistan. The current mobilization to Syria and Iraq, if not handled well, could result in a similar escalation of the terrorist threat.

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Notes

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Group, April 20, 2010, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/189-indonesia-jihadi-surprise-in-aceh.aspx>.

4. *Ibid.*

5. “Indonesian Jihadists and Syria: Training Ground,” RSIS, October 14, 2013, <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/2081-indonesian-jihadists-and-syria/>.

6. “al-Hayat Media Center presents a new video message from The Islamic State: ‘Join the Ranks,’” *Jihadology*, July 22, 2014, <http://jihadology.net/2014/07/22/al-%E1%B8%A5ayat-media-center-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-join-the-ranks/>.

7. “Katibah Nusantara: Islamic State’s Malay Archipelago Combat Unit,” RSIS, May 26, 2014, <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/CO15126.pdf>.

8. “The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050,” Pew Research Centre, April 2, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/muslims/>.